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Testimony In Support of HB 6526

Dear Members of the Energy and Technology Committee:

I always considered myself a well-informed, educated consumer. I research just about everything I buy. I thought I did a good job selecting my third-party electric supplier. I'm a volunteer with AARP Connecticut and I signed up to learn the material to present a workshop on helping consumers select or not select a third-party electric supplier, after all, I did such a good job for myself, I should help others. Ha! Was I in for a rude awakening! I was **not** getting the best rate. I had not paid close enough attention to my contract dates. After the training, or maybe even during the training, I immediately selected a new vendor and a better rate and marked on my calendar to watch for the next rate change.

My first time in a workshop revealed that many consumers, like me, were not getting the best rate, some had horrible terms with cancellation fees, and many had selected rates years before and were paying far more for their electric service than they should. During the workshop, I learned a fellow volunteer was in the same position. It was clear some with low electric usage would be better off sticking with the standard rate instead of trying to remember and then missing the opportunity to change rates. Like me, they were embarrassed to see that they fell for a teaser rate and were lulled into thinking they had made a good choice for the long haul. I saw consumers' bills that were locked into rates far above the standard service. Some argued with us that they could not possibly have been that gullible. One reported that a nephew must have changed her service years before when he lived with her. He no longer lived with his aunt, but her rate was a reminder that good intentions are no protection for future circumstances. The thing is, electric bills have gotten better over the years with better information to help users, but they are still intimidating to the average consumer with fine print hard to read even with the best bifocals.

The protections in HB 6526, especially ending cancellation fees and auto-renewed contracts, will go a long way to fixing the persistent problems with the third party electric supplier market. I urge you to pass this vital bill.

Barbara Munck